

## THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC DA'WAH AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SHARIA ON THE EXISTENCE OF MUSLIMS IN THE MALDIVES ISLANDS PAST AND PRESENT

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### Abstract

*Writing this article aims to explain the development of Islamic da'wah in the Maldives Islands, which is unique and rarely found in other Muslim regions. So far, the Maldives is only known as a tourist spot. It is rarely known that all of the Maldives adhere to Islam. The British have also ruled the Maldives for 78 years, influencing the Maldives to some extent. What is the form of da'wah carried out by Abu al-Barakat, whose origins are still debated by historians? But what is clear is that he had a significant influence on the spread of Islam in the Maldives Islands, which is corroborated by classical sources such as the text attributed to Ibn Battuta and several contemporary books. We conducted a literature study on this paper, with a historical approach, by collecting data, verifying and analyzing the data thoroughly, and rewriting the results of the analysis inductively in a qualitative descriptive form. Islam spread in the Maldives peacefully without violence and continues to survive from Christian missionaries and Shiite sects who come to spread their views. Scholars say about the fiqh theory that faith in conscience will not be changed by the sins and heresies it commits.*

**Keywords:** *Da'wah; Sharia; Muslims; Maldives.*

### Abstrak

*Penulisan artikel ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan perkembangan dakwah Islam di Kepulauan Maladewa yang unik dan jarang ditemukan di wilayah muslim lainnya. Selama ini Maladewa hanya dikenal sebagai tempat wisata. Jarang diketahui bahwa*

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*semua Maladewa menganut Islam. Inggris juga telah memerintah Maladewa selama 78 tahun, yang sedikit banyak mempengaruhi Maladewa. Bagaimanakan bentuk dakwah yang dilakukan oleh Abu al-Barakat yang asal-usulnya masih diperdebatkan oleh para ahli sejarah? Namun yang jelas ia memiliki pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap penyebaran Islam di Kepulauan Maladewa, yang dikuatkan oleh sumber-sumber klasik seperti teks yang dikaitkan dengan Ibnu Battuta dan beberapa buku-buku kontemporer. Kami melakukan studi literatur terhadap makalah ini, dengan pendekatan historis, dengan mengumpulkan data, memverifikasi dan menganalisis data secara menyeluruh, dan menulis ulang hasil analisis secara induktif dalam bentuk deskriptif kualitatif. Islam menyebar di wilayah Maladewa dengan damai tanpa kekerasan dan terus bertahan dari misionaris Kristen dan aliran Syiah yang datang untuk menyebarkan pandangan mereka. Ulama mengatakan Iman dalam kalbu tidak akan berubah oleh dosa dan bid'ah yang dilakukannya.*

**Kata Kunci:** Dakwah; Syariah; Umat Islam; Maladewa.

### مستخلص

تهدف كتابة هذا المقال إلى شرح تطور الدعوة الإسلامية في جزر المالديف التي تعتبر فريدة ونادراً ما توجد في المناطق الإسلامية الأخرى. حتى الآن ، لا تُعرف جزر المالديف إلا كموقع سياحي. نادراً ما يُعرف أن كل جزر المالديف تلتزم بالإسلام. حكم البريطانيون أيضاً جزر المالديف لمدة 78 عاماً ، مما أثر على جزر المالديف إلى حد ما. ما هو شكل الدعوة التي قام بها أبو البركات والتي لا يزال المؤرخون محل نقاش حول أصولها؟ لكن الواضح أنه كان له تأثير كبير في انتشار الإسلام في جزر المالديف ، وهو ما أكدته المصادر الكلاسيكية مثل النص المنسوب لابن بطوطة والعديد من الكتب المعاصرة. لقد أجرينا دراسة أدبية على هذه الورقة ، بمنهج تاريخي ، من خلال جمع البيانات ، والتحقق من البيانات وتحليلها بدقة ، وإعادة كتابة نتائج التحليل استقرائياً في شكل وصفي نوعي. انتشر الإسلام في جزر المالديف بسلام دون عنف ولا يزال يعيش من المبشرين المسيحيين والطوائف الشيعية الذين يأتون لنشر آرائهم. يقول العلماء أن الإيمان بالقلب لن يتغير بالذنوب والبدع التي يرتكبها.

الكلمات الرئيسية : الدعوة؛ الشريعة؛ أمة الإسلام؛ المالديف.

## A. Introduction

Most of us have an image of the Maldives as a beautiful, serene, secluded island, representing a wonderful place to spend quality time hopping from one island to another, but some of us may not know that most of the island's population is Muslim. If you see this information, do you, dear reader, know the story of how Islam entered the Maldives and how did Islam survive in the Maldives against external and internal exposure from a different dimension? This exciting yet beautiful story begins with the Moroccan traveler Abu Barakat Al-Barbari. This article will take you on a journey through history, particularly around the eleventh century AD.

We use religious research methods that examine the practice of religious teachings by humans individually and collectively. In spiritual research, religion is a social phenomenon.

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We study people who live and are influenced by religion. Based on socio-cultural facts or realities, we investigate how religion exists in behavior, interactions, culture, and social systems. Employing a literature study, the author conducts document analysis and verifies and reinterprets the religious phenomena in the Maldives Islands as a whole and the impact of various kinds of preaching that come there. Interpretation is made qualitatively normative. Islam did not spread there in this way, so the influence of the traders was modest, and their power did not exceed that of some current or other converts to Islam, but a significant impact came via a Muslim traveler from Morocco - and said to be from Somalia - to the country, We examined several sources in this article, including the Egyptian writer and historian Mahmoud Shaker, who mentioned in his book Islamic History that Islam began to enter the Maldives in 85 H, in the seventh century AD. It was followed by Muslim traders who arrived in the area during the reign of the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan.

In writing this article, we also studied primary sources, namely the book by Ibn Battuta. The title is "The Masterpiece of the Spectators in Gharaib Al-Amsar." This book discusses the da'wah process carried out by Abu Barakat from Morocco, who tried hard to shift paganism to become the religion of monotheism, Islam. The second primary source is a thesis entitled Mazahir al-Hadharah al-Islamiyah fi Maldive Munzu Dukhul al-Islam Hatta Qiyah al-Jumhuri. In this thesis, we discuss at length the history of the entry of Islam into the Maldives. After studying these texts inductively, we make a general, descriptive qualitative interpretation based on a series of historical journeys of Islam in the Maldivian Islands. It is described in the book about the strong faith and belief of a Muslim who the Maldivian Ruler ordered to live for several months; if he survives Jin Ifrit, then the King will embrace Islam. This is because many people experience interference from these spirits. It turned out that Abu Barakat survived the disturbance of Jin Ifrit and is widely known by the people of the Maldivian Islands. The da'wah missions before and after Abu Barakat and Ibn Battuta also played an essential role in strengthening the people's faith which superstitions and superstitions could no longer shake. Therefore, the rule says that faith comes from the heart, then the acts of sin and Bid'ah (heresy) one commit will no longer eliminate one's faith. The secondary sources used in writing this article are Lankina, Tomila, and Lullit Getachew. "Competitive Religious Entrepreneurs: Christian Missionaries and Women's Education in Colonial and Post-Colonial India." The British Journal of Political Science discusses the colonialists' pressure to impose religion on the colonized population, sometimes through missionaries and traders with dual roles. However, residents in British-occupied areas such as the Maldives were not much

affected by the missionaries' invitation to their country during the colonial era. The focus of this article's research is to examine the causes of the survival of Muslims in the Maldivian Islands in the religion of Islam and its Shari'a, even though there have been many influences coming from outside, such as Christian Missionaries, Shia Muslims, and others who have hit the Aqidah that they have believed in so far.

## **B. Discussion**

Asian Islands or the Republic of the Maldives is a country located in the continent of Asia in the Indian Ocean, and the equator passes through it to the south. It is located southwest of Sri Lanka and India or Mohaldeen, and it is likely that it was distorted and became pronounced in the Maldives. Britain ruled the Maldives for 78 years as a British protectorate, and the Maldives became independent in 1965 AD. Its name in the official language is *Devi Raji* (Republic of the Maldives), with a population of 309 thousand people in a square km, and its capital is Male.

Before their conversion to Islam, the inhabitants of the Maldives were subject to customs that burdened their lives, such as offering a woman to be an offering to what they called "the devil of the sea."<sup>1</sup> This transformation was the most critical point in the country's history known to contemporary Maldivians.

The Maldivian constitution says that Islam is a condition for Maldivian citizenship. No non-Muslim Maldivian exists in the hundreds of charming small islands known to Arab sailors and merchants by the twelfth century. In the heart of the Maldivian is the tomb of "Abu al-Barakat Yusuf al-Barbari." As it appears from his name, he is a Moroccan Berber farewell traveler who ended one of his trips on one of the ten thousand and 87 Maldivian islands. Shanuraza, the Sultan of the Maldives, converted to Islam at the hands of Abi Al-Barakat, and his compatriots who professed Buddhism followed him. The Sultan built mosques and schools to teach people their new religion, which they all entered.<sup>2</sup>

The Arab merchants were also a reason for converting the inhabitants of the Malabar coast (the southwestern coast of the lands of the Indian subcontinent) to Islam in the seventh century AD. The countries of Sindh and Punjab (present-day Pakistan) became Muslim when they reached the armies of conquest led by Muhammad bin Qasim al-Thaqafi in approximately the same period. At the same time, the Maldives remained a Buddhist kingdom

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Gray, *Ibn Batuta in the Maldives and Ceylon*. New Delhi. 1996

<sup>2</sup> Boris Wille, "The Appropriation of Islam in the Maldives," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, by Boris Wille (Oxford University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.680>.

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for five hundred years until the conversion to Islam.<sup>3</sup> With the conversion of the last Buddhist Maldivian kings of the Maldives to Islam, he called himself Sultan Muhammad al-Adil. He initiated a dynasty of six Islamic dynasties consisting of eighty-four sultans until 1932 when the Sultanate became elected.

Historically, Arabic was the primary language of administration there, instead of the Persian and Urdu languages used in nearby Islamic countries. Another link to North Africa in the Maldives was the Maliki school of jurisprudence that prevailed in Morocco and was the official school in those islands until the seventeenth century. Some researchers narrate another scenario considering that Ibn Battuta made a mistake regarding the Maldives and sided with the Maghreb narration in his attribution to Abu Barakat, the Berbers. At the same time, Abu Barakat the Berber may be descended from Berbera (an ancient commercial port in northern Somalia). When Ibn Battuta visited the islands, the island's ruler was the Somali Abd al-Aziz al-Maqdishu (concerning Somali Mogadishu). Abd al-Aziz was a sultan on the islands of the Sultanate of Ajuran. This Somali Islamic Sultanate ruled parts of the Horn of Africa in the Middle Ages. This narration also helps explain the use of the Arabic language to rule in the Maldives and the dominance of the Maliki school of thought in a non-Maliki geographical area in East Asia.

The Maldives maintains an ancient Sufi religious heritage; cafes and restaurants are closed during the day in Ramadan, and the "Islamic law" known in the Maldivian language as Sarito constitutes the fundamental law of the Maldives.<sup>4</sup>

## ***1. Ibn Battuta in the Maldives***

Ibn Battuta traveled to all the countries of the East, starting from his home city of Tangier in Morocco, all the way to India, which was then under the command of the Muslim Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq Shah. Ibn Battuta worked as a judge for the Sultan and lived for several years there. However, he was worried because the Sultan was always volatile and quick to anger, so he was afraid that something terrible would happen to him if he remained in his service.

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<sup>3</sup> Mamdooha Ismail, Ali Khatibi, and S. M. Ferdous Azam, "Impact of School Culture on School Effectiveness in Government Schools in Maldives," *Participatory Educational Research* 9, no. 2 (March 1, 2022): 261–79, <https://doi.org/10.17275/per.22.39.9.2>.

<sup>4</sup> Darmaiza Darmaiza et al., "The Dynamics and Role of Sufism in Turkish Politics and Society," *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism; Vol 11, No 2 (2022)DO - 10.21580/Tos.V11i2.12443*, December 16, 2022, <https://journal.walisongo.ac.id/index.php/teosofia/article/view/12443>.

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In 1341, the Sultan chose him to be his envoy to the Sultan of the Mongols in China.<sup>5</sup> He embarked on his journey to escape his anxiety and fear of the Sultan. During his trip, Ibn Battuta was kidnapped, and everything he owned was robbed, and the kidnapers left him only with his pants! Later, Ibn Battuta managed to travel to the southern Indian Ocean, reaching the Maldives. He tells us the story of Islam entering these beautiful islands. Ibn Battuta resided there for a year before completing his trip to China.

Abu Barakat Al-Barbari The sheik who overcame the "Imp."

When Ibn Battuta arrived in the Maldives, it was ruled by a sultan named Khadija. On one of the days he was there, he found himself in the midst of what looked like a festival. People gathered on the coast reciting Takbeer and children, Qurans on their heads, and women beating on copper utensils. Ibn Battuta was surprised and asked them about their situation and the reason for this, so they asked him to look at the sea, and when he looked, he found something like a big boat, and they said to him: This is a demon, and it usually appears once a month. If we did what you saw from us now, he would turn away from us and not harm us. Thus they attracted the traveler's curiosity, so he investigated the matter until the "trustworthy" told him, according to what he tells us in his travels. Thus, Ibn Battuta asked some jurists and judges, and they answered him with the story. In the distant time, a demon appeared to the people of these islands from the sea at a specific time every month. When it occurred, they took one of the virgin girls, adorned it, put it in the house of idols erected on the coast, and left it there for the night, and when the morning came, they found it dead.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the residents arranged a monthly lottery, so whoever had the lot from among the residents had to offer his virgin daughter to this demon. After many years, this Muslim traveler, Abu Barakat Al-Barbari, reached them. When Abu Barakat arrived, he found them in that condition, and he was living in an older woman's house on one of the islands. Barakat al-Barbari wanted to save the girl, so he told the older woman that he would enter as a substitute for her daughter.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Abu Barakat Al-Barbari specializes in that adventure. He entered the house of idols and began reciting the Qur'an. When the goblin appeared to him and heard the Qur'an,

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<sup>5</sup> Yelmi Eri Firdaus Elfia Elfia and Meirison, "RISE AND FALL OF MAMLUK SULTANATE: The Struggle Against Mongols and Crusaders in Holy War," *FUSA UIN Imam Bonjol Padang* 1, no. 1 (June 2020): 14–28.

<sup>6</sup> Anne Haour and Annalisa Christie, *Archaeological Investigations of the Maldives in the Medieval Islamic Period: Ibn Battuta's Island*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003166221>.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew C. S. Peacock, "History, Piety and Factional Politics in the Arabic Chronicle of the Maldives: asan T j al-D n's *Ta' r kh* and Its Continuations," *Asiatische Studien - Études Asiatiques* 74, no. 1 (November 18, 2020): 195–220, <https://doi.org/10.1515/asia-2020-0015>.

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he returned directly to the sea. The following day, when the older woman and her family arrived, they found Abu Barakat alive as he was, without being touched by anything. Thus, Abu Barakat al-Barbari reached their King, Shanuraza, so he heard the story from them. Abu Barakat offered him, Islam, so he decided to test Abu Barakat and said to him: Stay with us until next month, and if you do the same thing with the demon, you will become Muslim. Thus, the month did not pass without the King. His entire family embraced Islam, and on the next date for the goblin, Abu Barakat al-Barbari entered the temple, and the goblin did not come. So the King of the island sent to the rest of the other islands to embrace Islam with him and the people of his island, and thus the inhabitants converted to Islam and lived according to the doctrine of the imam. Malik was Abu Barakat al-Barbari. Moreover, they built a mosque in his name.

The story may seem legendary, but yes, perhaps it is, and it seems that the goblin ritual was a mythical ritual that the population inherited from their ancestors. It appears that Abu Barakat the Berber did nothing but confront this legend, and because of his position, the Maldives' inhabitants have become Muslims.

Some researchers say that there is another scenario related to the narration of Ibn Battuta, who may have made a mistake about the Maldives and was biased towards the Moroccan narrations in attributing the entry of Islam to the Moroccan sheik, Abu al-Barkan al-Barbari, while the man may be from Berbera (an ancient commercial port in northern Somalia).

When Ibn Battuta visited the islands (according to the contradictory narration), the island's ruler at that time was the Somali Abd al-Aziz al-Maqdishui (relative to the Somali Mogadishu). Abd al-Aziz was Sultanate over the islands by Sultan Oran, the Somali Muslim Sultan who ruled large parts of the Horn of Africa in the Middle Ages.

According to this account, Abu Barakat al-Barbari was the same as Yusuf ibn Ahmad al-Kunin, who founded the Washma family in the Horn of Africa, which ruled the Sultanate of Ifat and the Sultanate of Justice in East Africa. This novel also helps explain the use of the Arabic language in leading the Maldives and the dominance of the Maliki school in a non-Eastern geographical context in East Asia.

The Maldives preserves the legacy of Sufi Sufism. It closes cafes and restaurants during the day in Ramadan and forms "Islamic law" known in the Maldives as the Sarito Basic Law of the Maldives.

## **2. *Religious Freedom in the Maldives***

The Maldives Constitution of 2008 states that Islam is the official state religion. Only Muslims can obtain the country's citizenship and are prohibited from practicing any religion other than Islam. Non-Muslim citizens or citizens of other countries cannot practice their religion publicly and collectively, and they are also banned from spreading their faith in the country. Any resident of the Maldives must teach their child the Islamic faith. The constitution stipulates that the president, ministers, members of parliament, and island chiefs must be Sunni Muslims. Judicial rulings are based on Islamic law, and only government-approved Muslim scholars can issue fatwas. Freedom of religion has been severely restricted in the Maldives since 2007, and numerous cases of discrimination based on religious belief or practice of religious rites have been recorded. Maldivian officials and intellectuals believe that Islam is one of the most defining characteristics of their society and that it reinforces national unity and the country's identity. The Maldives has imposed the death penalty since 2014 on anyone who converts from Islam.<sup>8</sup>

## **3. *Religious Demography***

The Maldives has an area of 500 square miles (1,300 square kilometers) spread over 1,200 islands, and the population is about 450,000. The people of the Maldives belong to different ethnic groups, the most important of which are: South Indian, Sinhalese, and Arab. The vast majority of the Muslim population adheres to the Sunni sect. Non-Muslim foreigners are allowed to practice their religion. These include more than 500,000 tourists who visit the country annually (mostly from Europe and Japan) and about 54,000 foreign workers (mainly from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India, and Bangladesh). Muslim workers and tourists are allowed to attend local mosques. However, most practice religious rites privately or in the workplaces' mosques.<sup>9</sup>

## **4. *Status of Religious freedoms***

Christianity in the Maldives is a small minority, as the Maldives includes a small number of indigenous Christians. According to some sources, the number of Christians is around 300, while the organization Open Doors estimates the number of Christians is only a

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<sup>8</sup> Rhonda Di Biase, "Moving beyond the Teacher-Centred/Learner-Centred Dichotomy: Implementing a Structured Model of Active Learning in the Maldives," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, February 27, 2018, 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2018.1435261>.

<sup>9</sup> Aishath Muneza et al., "Need to Pioneer Islamic Tourism in Tourist Resorts in Maldives," *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 11, no. 4 (July 18, 2019): 895–916, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-01-2019-0004>.



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few thousand. Researcher Felix Wilfred of the University of Oxford estimates that the number of Christians in the Maldives in 2013 was around 1,400, constituting 0.4% of the total population.<sup>10</sup> Most of them are migrant workers in the tourism sector, and their origins are mainly in the Philippines, India, and Sri Lanka. In the early-mid 16th century, power fell under the influence of the Portuguese Empire. Due to dynastic strife, there was a brief period in which the country was ruled by a Catholic monarch from the Hilali dynasty, Dom Manuel, who ruled through Portuguese support between 1558 and 1573. Before converting from Islam to Christianity, he was known as Sultan Hassan IX.<sup>11</sup> However, the era of King Dom Manuel ended in 1573 with the restoration of the crown by the Sunni Muslim government. Dom Manuel is the first Maldivian and royal family member to leave Islam and convert to Christianity. According to various human rights reports, the Maldives is one of the world's most intolerant countries towards Christians. According to former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, no religion other than Islam should be allowed in the Maldives. Christian public practices are banned, conversion from Islam means loss of Maldivian citizenship, and possessing a Bible is punishable by death. Currently, the Maldives is the only country in the world besides Saudi Arabia that prohibits the construction of churches on its territory.<sup>12</sup>

The people of the Maldives embraced Buddhism as a religion until the twelfth century, with the conversion of the people of the islands to the Islamic religion. At the beginning of the middle of the sixteenth century, power fell under the influence of the Portuguese Empire. As a result of the family conflict, there was a short period of rule of the country by the Catholic King, Dom Manuel, through the support of the Portuguese between 1558 and 1573. It was previously known as Sultan Hassan IX, and a Catholic from the Maldives named Andiri Andirin was appointed as his guardian. Dom Manuel's conversion to Christianity deposed him from the wedding, and later he lived in Goa, a Portuguese Empire colony. Jesuit missionaries tried to exploit the idea of a Catholic monarch in the country for proselytizing. However, the era of King Dom Manuel ended in 1573 with the restoration of the crown by the Sunni Muslim administration. Dom Manuel, who remained in Goa, had three sons, Dom Joao, Dom Francisco, and Dom Pedro. Dom Joao married a Portuguese Christian noblewoman, Doña Francisca Vasconil, and had two children, Dom Felipe and Doña Inez. Ibrahim Kalvan ruled the Sultanate de facto, but in legal terms, he was the regent of the kings Dom Joao and Dom

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<sup>10</sup> Peacock, "History, Piety and Factional Politics in the Arabic Chronicle of the Maldives."

<sup>11</sup> Haour and Christie, *Archaeological Investigations of the Maldives in the Medieval Islamic Period*.

<sup>12</sup> Azim Zahir, *Islam and Democracy in the Maldives: Interrogating Reformist Islam's Role in Politics*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003181453>.

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Philip, who resided in Goa, India. He ruled from 1585 to 1609. Muhammad Thakuruva made a treaty with King Dom Manuel of Goa to fend off the Ali Raja of Cannanore. Although Muhammad Thakuruva was the regent of King Dom Manuel (according to the treaty), the Maldivians appointed Muhammad Thakuruva as Sultan of the Maldives, no longer recognizing the suzerainty of the exiled Christian kings and rulers of Goa. Attempts by the Portuguese to impose Christianity sparked a local rebellion led by Muhammad Thakuruva-e-Azam and his two brothers, and fifteen years later, the Portuguese were expelled from the Maldives. In 1632, Sultan Muhammad Imad al-Din I was appointed legal Sultan after he was a former guardian of King Dom Philip the Christian, and the rule passed from the Hilali dynasty to the Othimo dynasty.<sup>13</sup>

The Dutch and British empires never colonized the islands, despite their maritime control of the Indian Ocean. The Dutch, who replaced the Portuguese as the dominant power in Ceylon, established their hegemony over Maldivian affairs without directly intervening in the local affairs governed by centuries-old Islamic customs. Memories of the Spread of the Faith stated that in 1833 after Clement Bonand had been appointed as Apostolic Vicar in Pondicherry, the Holy See authorized him to send missionaries to the Maldives because the Christian faith had not yet reached there. Between 1887 and 1965, Britain ruled the Maldives as a British protectorate, and the Maldives became independent in 1965. The British protectorate did not lead to any missionary work or the spread of Christianity among the indigenous population. With the country's independence, the constitution stipulated that the law stated that all citizens were Sunni Muslims and that non-Muslims (including Christians) had no right to vote or hold public office. After the independence of the islands, it was reported that there were dozens of migrant workers working in the Maldives, most of whom belonged to Protestant churches. Today's thriving tourism industry has brought many migrant workers to the islands, but since most are from nearby Muslim countries such as Bangladesh, the community remains Muslim.<sup>14</sup>

The Maldives Constitution of 2008 states that Islam is the official state religion. Only Muslims can obtain the country's citizenship and are prohibited from practicing any religion other than Islam. Non-Muslim citizens or citizens of other countries cannot practice their religion publicly and collectively, and they are also prohibited from spreading their faith in

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<sup>13</sup> Philip K. Hitti, "The Umayyad Caliphate: Mu' wiyah Establishes a Dynasty," in *History of the Arabs* (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1970), 189–98, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-15402-9\\_17](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-15402-9_17).

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Soares, "REFLECTIONS ON MUSLIM–CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTERS IN WEST AFRICA," *Africa* 86, no. 4 (November 2016): 673–97, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972016000619>.

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the country. Any resident of the Maldives must teach their child the Islamic faith.<sup>15</sup> The constitution stipulates that the president, ministers, members of parliament, and island chiefs must be Sunni Muslims. Judicial rulings are based on Islamic law, and only government-approved Muslim scholars can issue fatwas. Freedom of religion has been severely restricted in the Maldives since 2007, and numerous cases of discrimination based on religious belief or practice of religious rites have been recorded. Maldivian officials and intellectuals believe that Islam is one of the most defining characteristics of their society and that it reinforces national unity and the country's identity. The Maldives has imposed the death penalty since 2014 on anyone who renounces Islam.

### ***5. The legal and political framework***

Religious freedoms are severely restricted in the Maldives. The 1997 constitution states that Islam is the official state religion, and the current government uses this constitutional provision to require all citizens to be Muslims. The constitution also stipulates that the head of state must be a Sunni Muslim and have the supreme authority to spread the principles of Islam.<sup>16</sup> The second chapter of the constitution regarding citizens' fundamental rights and duties does not provide for the right to freedom of religion or belief. The shape prevents non-Muslims from voting, obtaining citizenship, and holding office publicly in the country. The Law for the Protection of Religious Unity stipulates that the government and the people must protect religious unity.<sup>17</sup> Any statement or action that contradicts this law is subject to a criminal penalty ranging from delicate to imprisonment and, in some cases, death. Non-Muslim foreign residents are not allowed to practice their religion. Religious practices can only be done in private, provided that they do not encourage local citizens to participate in these practices, and foreigners are not allowed to import any items or goods considered to be contrary to Islam, such as alcohol, pork products, or idols of worship. Alcohol is available on some tourist islands, but it is not allowed to be served to locals. Mosques do not have to be officially registered with the government. However, the government funds and subsidizes most mosques, and Islamic holidays are considered national holidays. The primary responsibility of the imams is to deliver Friday sermons, and the government must approve speeches. The imams are not allowed to write their addresses independently. No one can

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<sup>15</sup> Muhammad Ridho, Elfi Tajuddin, and Zulvia Trinova, "JEWISH FAITH, TALMUD, AND ZIONIST IN ISLAMIC REVIEW," n.d., 8.

<sup>16</sup> Peacock, "History, Piety and Factional Politics in the Arabic Chronicle of the Maldives."

<sup>17</sup> *Rapid Situation Assessment of Drug Abuse in Maldives* (New York: United Nations, 2003).

preach Islam publicly without the government's approval, even the imams themselves, and this law aims to maintain a moderate Islamic environment and combat fundamentalism.<sup>18</sup>

#### **6. *Maldives Tourism and The application of Sharia***

Most Muslims of our time do not know today that the Maldives is the only East Asian country in which the percentage of Muslims represents 100%. Despite the calls against it, it still maintains the application of Islamic law in the chapters "Borders" and "Inheritances," where Maldivian law stipulates The necessity for every holder of Maldivian nationality to be a Muslim. It lapses as soon as the change of religion is announced, and ethnicity is not given to non-Muslims for any reason.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, about this matter, the Maldivian Minister of Islamic Affairs, Muhammad Ali Shahim, says in an interview with the Kuwaiti "Al-Rai": "The Maldivian constitution is one of the rare constitutions in the Islamic world because it gives constitutional power to preserve Islam." Egyptian journalist and writer Muhammad Bayoumi say in a lengthy article for him. About the Maldives: "Also, all punishments are applied in the Maldives – except for stoning and amputation of the hand of the thief – where crimes of theft and committing vices vanish because of the adherence of the sons of this Muslim people to the teachings and guidance of the true Islamic religion."<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, since Abu Al-Barakat Al-Barbari planted the tree of monotheism and the correct Islamic belief in the Maldives, this country has not known another religion or belief contrary to that approach. Despite the many attempts aimed at placing the first nucleus of Christianity in the islands, the missionaries clash every time with the adherence of the descendants of Abu al-Barakat to their faith, despite the many material temptations they are exposed to. Under pressure from the people, the government expels foreign residents (teachers or tourists) who prove or appear to be carrying out proselytizing activities.<sup>21</sup>

The Maldives previously stood up to its former president, "Nasheed," who almost led the country to the abyss when there was intense talk about the possibility of building a church in the capital, "Maleh," despite the absence of any Christians on the islands!

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<sup>18</sup> Zahir, *Islam and Democracy in the Maldives*.

<sup>19</sup> Shamsul Falaah, "Islamic Shari'ah and the Rights of Women: The Maldives' Thirst for International Human Rights Norms of Equality and Non-Discrimination," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 13, no. 1 (January 1, 2016), doi:10.1515

<sup>20</sup> Meirison Meirison et al., "Muslim Occupation in France According to Arabic Literature and Western Historical Evidences," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 16, no. 1 (June 2021): 17–25, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol16no1.2>.

<sup>21</sup> 17 "ندوة التاريخ الإسلامي" , , no. 18 (December 1, 2004): 83–156, <https://doi.org/10.21608/nih.2004.272122>.

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Moreover, based on an international agreement with a few countries, a statue of Buddha was placed on one of the islands. Hence, the Indian workers went to worship him, and the Maldivians protested, so former President Muhammad Nasheed imprisoned the Criminal Court judge because of the issue. Hence, people went to the capital for 22 days to release the judge and demolish the idols. Furthermore, he ordered Nasheed to beat the demonstrators, but the people in the Maldives knew each other, and the police refused to do so, so he ordered the army to destroy the police, so he refused his request, so he had only to step down from power.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the Shiites tried to extend their thought to the charming Maldives through the Shiites of India close to it and by trying to falsify the identity of the Amazigh conqueror Abi Al-Barakat and claiming that he was Persian in origin, despite the frequent historical, archaeological, and religious evidence of his Moroccanness and Berberness. However, the biggest obstacle in the Shiism campaigns is the Maldivian law, which does not even allow changing the country's Sunni sect, represented by following the Shafi'i school of thought.<sup>23</sup>

### ***7. Between Shi'a Da'wah and Christian Missionaries***

Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Defense, had an official visit to the Maldives at the invitation of its President, Abdullah Abdul Qayyum. At the same time, observers believe that the recent Saudi moves towards the Maldives aim to consolidate the relationship with Maldivian institutions, enhance communication programs with officials there, and provide Saudi support by establishing several development projects.<sup>24</sup>

The Maldives, located in the Indian Ocean, are facing elite attempts to penetrate this Sunni country, where the percentage of Muslims represents 100%. For years it has resisted all the pressures and incentives of proselytizing. Many missionary institutions have failed to establish a nucleus of Christianity among its population of about 300 thousand people, Despite the many temptations.<sup>25</sup>

The Maldivian police announced their intention to deport an American family if investigations prove that they are working in Christianization among the inhabitants of the

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<sup>22</sup> Muneeza et al., "Need to Pioneer Islamic Tourism in Tourist Resorts in Maldives."

<sup>23</sup> Muneeza et al.

<sup>24</sup> Tomila Lankina and Lullit Getachew, "Competitive Religious Entrepreneurs: Christian Missionaries and Female Education in Colonial and Post-Colonial India," *British Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 1 (January 2013): 103–31, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123412000178>.

<sup>25</sup> Soares, "REFLECTIONS ON MUSLIM–CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTERS IN WEST AFRICA."

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Maldivian island of "Kinbedu." She asserted that Christianization contradicts the Maldivian constitution because the state religion is Islam. Sheikh "Abdullah bin Muhammad Ibrahim," the representative of the Salafist group, indicated that the group has been monitoring the American family since 2003 and confirmed that the family is affiliated with missionary missionaries that come to the state from time to time periodically. As a result, the Secretary of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs confirmed that if investigations prove this, that family will be immediately deported outside the Islamic State.

With the opening of the Maldivians to the world, some relief and charitable institutions began to help the Maldivians to face their challenges, including Islamic organizations and bodies from several countries. Residents, in addition to providing school curricula and books translated into the local language.<sup>26</sup> Although many charitable institutions in the Gulf have carried out several activities in the past years to help the Maldivians meet their needs, the Safavid desire is increasing to penetrate this entire Sunni country (Shafi'i), and the Safavid activities vary between advocacy projects and "humanitarian" work. Furthermore, the sources mention that the first attempts of the Safavid tide to put a hand on the island were through the Shiites of India, which are not far from the Maldives. A pivotal issue was raised on several occasions among the population, which is an attempt to falsify the identity of the man who was credited after God for spreading Islam throughout the Maldives, a preacher from the Maghreb known as Sheikh Al-Hafiz Abu Al-Barakat Yusuf Al-Barbari, and the claim of being of Persian origin. Organizations and delegations that fall under the Safavid banner are active under the pretext of economic and development cooperation with the Maldives and with other slogans.<sup>27</sup> They have commercial arms under the umbrella of major companies, some in Iran working in construction, transportation, industry, and engineering consultancy. They aim to establish a foothold in the most critical fields. Maldives is the tourism sector.<sup>28</sup>

The Maldives has always approached the doors of international lending organizations and donor institutions to establish or complete infrastructure projects and add many

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<sup>26</sup> Phu Doma Lama, "Gendered Consequences of Mobility for Adaptation in Small Island Developing States: Case Studies from Maafushi and Kudafari in the Maldives," *Island Studies Journal* 13, no. 2 (October 2018): 111–28, <https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.64>.

<sup>27</sup> Rukshana Fathimah, Susilo Nur Aji Cokro Darsono, and Nongluck Suphanchaimat, "Household Solar Photovoltaic Adoption in the Maldives: A Socioeconomic Perspective," *Jurnal Ekonomi & Studi Pembangunan* 21, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.18196/jesp.21.2.5040>.

<sup>28</sup> Asian Development Bank, "A Brighter Future for Maldives Powered by Renewables:: Road Map for the Energy Sector 2020–2030," 0 ed. (Manila, Philippines: Asian Development Bank, November 2020), <https://doi.org/10.22617/TCS200355-2>.

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development projects that the islands need, especially since the low per capita income there stresses the need for permanent humanitarian aid.

### **C. Conclusion**

With its tolerant spirit and good teachings, Islam never called anyone to convert to it by coercion and oppression. Instead, it was and will remain a religion that people will enter in dazzled crowds with its wisdom, laws, tolerance, and spirituality. as was the case concerning the Muslim people of the Maldives. Furthermore, the story of the conversion of the Maldivians to Islam is not strange and has nothing in it. It raises, but most of what is in it, the greatness of the Islamic call. Sheikh Al-Hafiz Abu Al-Barakat Yusuf Al-Barbari, who is from Morocco, entered the Maldives in the middle of the sixth century AH with some Arab merchants who were at that time making organized commercial trips between the Arabian Peninsula on the one hand and between the ports of India and Ceylon And the Maldives, on the other hand, found its people on the Buddhist religion, so he asked to meet the Sultan and invited him to Islam, but the Sultan refused at first despite his hospitality to the bearer of the call and his closeness to him. Sheikh Al-Hafiz Abu Al-Barakat still argued with the Sultan with wisdom and sound advice until he was convinced, so he became Muslim and ordered his people to embrace the religion. This event strengthened the thorn of the Muslims on the second day of the month of Rabi` al-Thani in the year 548 AH (1153 AD). The grandfather who ordered the Sultan to build it after his conversion to Islam is written in Arabic, and the writing on it is still apparent. This Sultan was called "Darmus Kalamanga" before Islam, so he changed his name after his conversion to "Darmus Muhammad bin Abdullah," and he ruled the Maldives for 25 years, 12 Including it before his conversion to Islam, and 13 years after it, and the mosque that he built, which is the first of its kind in that country, is still towering to the present time, lofty, telling of the strength and heroism of Islam. Its imam is the shrine of Sheikh Abu Al-Barakat, whom the Sultan needed to teach him the Qur'an until he passed away. May God have mercy on him.

It is worth noting that the people of the Maldives are Muslim people whose Islam is unblemished and adheres to their true religion and is not satisfied with it as an alternative that memorizes the Qur'an performs the five daily prayers, and follows Islamic law. The month of Ramadan without a legitimate excuse is considered a crime punishable by law, and the import or manufacture of alcoholic beverages is strictly prohibited. Although fishing is the source of livelihood for the population, going out to fish on Friday morning is not permitted for fear of

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missing the Friday prayer. The application of Islamic law for quite a long time and the persistent efforts of classical scholars, which contemporary scholars continued, and the loyalty of the Maldives to Islam, have made Islam survive in the Maldives. Its rarely found in other countries, namely the Maldives population is 100 percent Muslim. This is by the rules of Fiqh: Subconscious faith does not disappear by mere sins or heresy. *The roots of polytheism have been wholly eradicated since the Islamic da'wah brought by Abu al-Barakat. Therefore Islam can last a long time in the Maldives Islands, unlike in India, which is still full of superstition and polytheism.*

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